

BEARS

Giant Sequoia National Monument
Sequoia National Forest



The average person's conception of bears has come from years of television's version of the animals. Smokey, Gentle Ben, Winnie the Pooh and probably most of all, Yogi, come to mind when one envisions a bear. But these images are fantasy. The fact is that bears are wild animals that have become increasingly more common in the Sequoia National Forest.

The bears we are talking about are the American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*). Don't let the name fool you; these bears can be brown, blonde, or black. There are no grizzly bears left in California; the last one was shot in Tulare County in 1922.

Black bears are normally shy and reclusive animals but they often approach people in picnic and camping areas. Why, what are they after? This question can be answered with one word - food. Foraging for berries and grasses and roots - bear food - is harder than grabbing a carelessly hung stuff sack or abandoned ice chest filled with all manner of goodies - people food.

There is only one effective way to avoid a bear ruining a backpacking or camping trip and that is proper food storage. Taking the time to store your food correctly can make the difference between a quiet relaxing summer vacation or having to end it early because your food is gone.

Plus, when bears repeatedly obtain human food and garbage, they often become destructive and dangerous and must be killed. To prevent this, store your food and other scented items properly at all times.

Food must be stored properly any time you are not preparing and eating it. Store anything with an odor (soap, sunscreen, garbage) the same as food. Always remember that food can take many shapes for bears. Their sense of smell is tremendous and they can perceive all sorts of things as food. Toothpaste becomes peppermint candy; soap may smell like fruit, a water bottle with Kool-Aide residue could represent a bowl of cherries. Have anything that smells? Store it properly with the rest of your food.

When you are eating food or using scented items keep them within arm's reach. When you are done with them, immediately store them properly. Plan to set up camp, eat dinner, and store food before dark.

Portable bear canisters are an easy way for backpackers to store their food. Canisters usually weigh 2-3 pounds and hold about a week's worth of food. Place all food, trash, and scented items in the canister, make sure the lid is on tight, and place canister on the ground at least 50 feet away from your campsite. Avoid putting it near rivers, cliffs, or other areas where the canister may get lost if a bear does decide to roll it around to try to get inside it. For more tips, please see the back of this page. For a list of approved canisters and areas in which they are required, please visit www.sierrawildbear.gov

If canisters are not available, counter balance your food. Pack your food in two strong stuff sacks, bring about 50 feet of parachute cord or other strong lightweight rope, find a suitable tree branch, and then follow the instructions on the back of this page.

If you are camping in one of the developed car campgrounds food storage is also important. Just because there are more people around and vehicles doesn't mean there is less danger of losing your food. After all, more people mean more food.

When you are away from camp store ice chests and food bags in a metal bear locker, if provided at the campsite. Make sure it is locked up tight! If there is no locker, store your food and anything that smells in the trunk of your vehicle or inside your motor home or camper. If no trunk is available, put your ice chest inside your car and cover it so it is not in plain view. Bears know what ice chests look like and what they contain. Make sure you keep your car windows rolled up and car doors closed and locked.

Sometimes, even with precautions, a bear will successfully obtain some food from your camp. Under no circumstances should you try to retrieve your lost food from a bear. While not normally aggressive toward humans, bears, like most animals are possessive of their food and will defend it. But please pick up and pack out all debris after it has left.

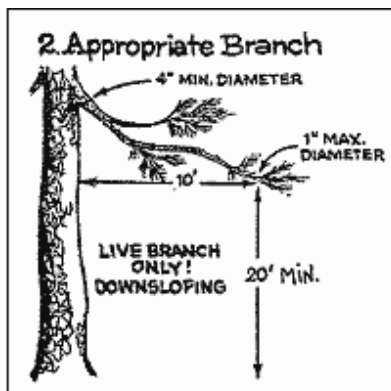
What if your food is stored properly and a bear wanders into your camp? Keep a safe distance, gather your family around you, and keep watch. Remember, the bear is looking for food and if there is none around it will probably move on. If it does approach you, make yourself look big, make noise, and try to scare it away. Report any injuries or damage to a ranger.

With a little thought and preparation, you can have a great stay in the Sequoia National Forest and at the same time help preserve these beautiful wild creatures in their natural state.



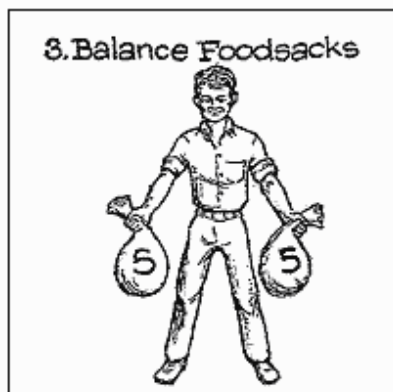
1. Search for a tree

Find the tree with the appropriate branch, even if you have to walk 1/4 mile



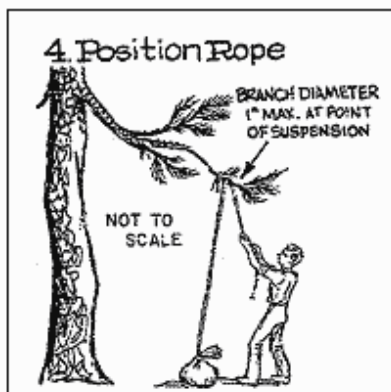
2. Appropriate Branch

No object that could support bear below branch



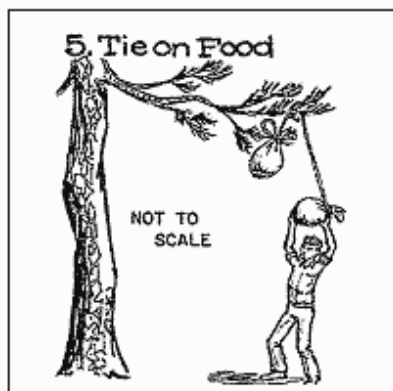
3. Balance Foodsacks

Equal weight:
10 lb. max per sack



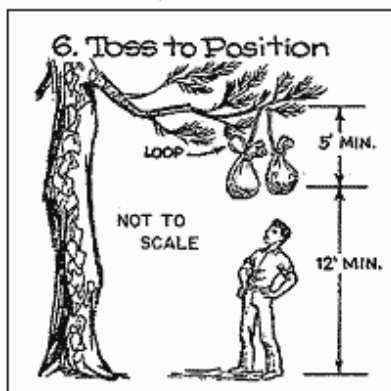
4. Position Rope

As far out on branch as will support weight of food (and not cub)



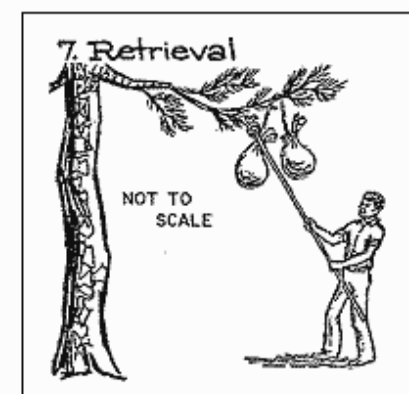
5. Tie on Food

With one sack hoisted to branch, tie second sack as high as possible



6. Toss to Position

Tie a secure loop in rope near one sack for retrieval; put excess rope in sack



7. Retrieval

Hook loop with stick and pull down

Illustrations and text courtesy
Yosemite National Park

How to Pack your Bear Canister

- Choose foods that pack small and measure out every meal.
- Repackage your food and toiletries into baggies or small containers.
- Carry the first two meals outside of the canister: lunch and dinner.
- At the trailhead, make sure that ALL food, trash, toiletries and scented items will fit inside the canister the first night.
- Put the canister and your kitchen 50 feet from your sleeping area. Leave the canister on the ground. Do not hang the canister from a tree.

Benefits of Using a Canister

- Less stress, increased peace of mind
- More time at camp to relax instead of thinking of ways to store food
- Guaranteed food supply if bears or other animals visit your camp
- No aborted trips because bears ate your food
- Freedom to camp anywhere including above tree line
- No need to search for the right tree or carry ropes and food sacks for counter-balancing
- Canister can also be used as small table, a chair, or a water bucket
- Increased safety for you and protection of wild animals



"The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin,

age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer."

